

Nimuendajá: *The Eastern Timbira*

171

tamed peccary (taitetá). The parare race and probably the pereá hunt also, with the subsequent race, may be secondary transfers from ketúaye to pepyé.

The principal object of ketúaye is manifestly to bring the boys into contact with the spirits of the dead—a singular association of religion with the socioceremonial organization of this tribe (cf. p. 163). This communion, helpful and necessary for the boys, is fraught with danger for all inexperienced persons. This basic idea finds expression not only in the origin myth, which reports how the several ceremonies and songs of the spirits were furtively seen and overheard, but also in such acts as the feeding of the boys with invisible victuals. Evidently the original belief was that the spirits, lured by their own songs as regularly chanted by the boys, enter the bodies of the novices, who henceforth behave like the spirits themselves until these are removed by ablutions and flagellation. Hence the race with the miniature logs of the spirits.

However, no contemporary Canella clearly grasps this conception. While some informants offer explanations and suggestions wholly in harmony with mine, others search for all sorts of rationalistic or even therapeutic warrants *ad hoc*, exposing the secondary character of their interpretations. These men are honestly convinced that all ceremonial exists for its own sake exclusively and do not bother their heads over questions of origin and significance.

The Apinayé, who in general are somewhat more religiously inclined, wholly lack the notion of a communion between novices and spirits at initiation:

Quite different is the object of pepyé, said to have originated in the voluntary seclusion of two boys for the express purpose of developing as rapidly as possible into strong young men—not in order to marry, but in order to avenge their parents, killed by a man-eating giant falcon. The avowed purpose of entering as a boy and suddenly emerging as a handsome young man, according to Indian standards of beauty, is too transparent a notion to have escaped even the attention of Neobrazilian neighbors. Any settler when questioned will at once explain that the Indians shut up their lads in a *chiqueiro* (pigsty) and marry them off after forced feeding designed to enhance their virility.

Actually graduation from the entire initiation cycle was a prerequisite to matrimony, but by no means rendered immediate marriage obligatory. For one thing, the age of the initiates would range from fifteen to twenty-five, while males rarely took a wife before they were twenty. However, the pepyé festival does include instructions about the choice of spouses and married life, and the terminal ceremony, in which their prospective mothers-in-law lead the initiates by a rope, drastically represents the impending union.

Thus, the ketúaye is basically a religious performance, while the pepyé belongs to the social sphere.

I shall now present the origin myth of the ketúaye and then describe my own observations; this will be followed by parallel data on the pepyé.

KETÚAYE

Origin myths.—The great falcon Hakti had devoured so many villagers that the survivors decided to flee. A boy who had been delayed in a plantation and knew nothing of this decision was left behind. When at last he went home and entered the deserted village, he saw in the plaza a crowd of dancing and singing figures who were painted red. He was about to walk up to them at once, when the shade of his deceased uncle warned him to go round the outside of the village. The souls of the dead in the plaza, however, had already noticed him. "Look, there is a boy coming!" cried one. "He is mine!" cried another. "No, mine!" exclaimed a third. The boy fled, but outside the settlement he climbed a lofty tree, from which he could survey the plaza. Thence he saw how something was being brought to the souls from the houses. They knelt down, cupped their hands

V. RELIGION AND MAGIC

EARLIER SOURCES

175
771
In the older literature there are no usable statements about Eastern Timbira religion. According to Ribeiro,

Não se lhes conhece a mais pequena demonstração de culto ou religião qualquer que ella seja, pois é sua razão a esse respeito submergida no chaos da ignorancia, sendo lhes bem indifferentes que o sol nasça ou que se esconda.

(Not the slightest manifestation of cult or religion is known from them, rather is their reason buried in ignorance in this regard, and they are quite indifferent whether the sun rises or is concealed).²⁷

As will appear, things are not quite so bad as all that.

About Pörekamekra religion an interpreter told Pohl the following:²⁸

Die Indianer erkennen ein höchstes Wesen, welches sie mit dem Namen Tur-pi bezeichnen, es wohnt im Himmel, sendet Regen, Sonnenschein und Gewitter und verschafft ihnen Nahrung. Sie glauben an Fortdauer nach dem Tode, ewigen Lohn und ewige Strafe.

I cannot confirm these statements concerning a Supreme Being and am unable to explain the term Turpi. Pohl, with whom Snethlage agrees, ascribes these doctrines to previous instruction by Jesuits from Pará.

114
771
Snethlage regards as certain a lunar and astral cult, which he infers from a nocturnal dance he attended.²⁹ This was performed in the plaza by men in a circle stepping first with one leg, then the other, while turning their bodies, gazing toward the sky, and repeatedly uttering the word *katšere* (star). I have vainly tried to get data from the Indians concerning this dance, which I never witnessed. Thus, I asked all the precentors for texts of songs containing the word in question or otherwise dealing with stars. The solitary chant which they cited again and again is that concerned with Halley's comet (p. 190). This, however, is sung in quite a different setting and exclusively during a pepyé celebration. Snethlage's visit, however, coincided with a Mummies' festival, such as I was also able to attend in 1935, but without noting anything even remotely suggested by his account. The procedure he saw then must have been of a quite special and isolated character. As a matter of fact, hardly any religious significance attaches to the stars among these Canella, whereas the moon does play a part, though by no means the principal one. Concerning animistic beliefs Snethlage reports nothing.

Fróes Abreu conceived the precentor of the nocturnal dances as a medicine-man and the performances themselves as prayers (*rezas* in Indian parlance). He heard of a celestial god who was the father of all humanity, but was unable to get further information. Nor was Pompeu Sobrinho able to extract relevant data. He erroneously regards the syllable *vri* in *pqudvrj* (*büt'era* in his orthography), moon, as a feminine suffix, whence he conjectures that a male sun and a female moon are connected with Canella religion. Finally, Abbé Etienne Ignace declares: "Ce sont des catholiques ayant conservé des pratiques superstitieuses."³⁰

CELESTIAL BODIES

771
171
Compared with, say, the Guarani, the *Ramkô'kamekra* certainly have very little religion, being in this respect inferior also to the *Serénte* and even to the *Apinayá*.

²⁷ Ribeiro, *Memoria*, § 9.

²⁸ Pohl, *Beise*, 2:206.

²⁹ Nordboström, *Ind.*, 154.

³⁰ Fróes Abreu, *Terra das Palmeiras*, 180 f.; Sobrinho, *Marrim*, 14; Ignace, *Les Capikras*, 478.

232 *University of California Publications in Am. Arch. and Ethn.*

- 771 Their public cult performances may be counted on the fingers of one hand, and
171 several years elapsed before I discovered a private act unrelated to animism.
- 773 The Sun and Moon myth of the Eastern Timbira greatly resembles that of the
171 Apinayé² and Serénte. I heard it not on'y among the Ramkô'kamekra, but also
Krahô'. Both characters are conceived as male and as unrelated to each other. In
Ramkô'kamekra myth they create mankind by diving in a brook, in a Pukôbye
variant, from bottle gourds in a plantation; but in none of the other six episodes
of the myth do they in any way work for the benefit of humanity. Nevertheless the
[776] Ramkô'kamekra regard themselves as primarily dependent on the Sun (Pqt) and
in much lesser degree also on the Moon (Pquvri).
- 782 The purpose of all the general cult performances is to invoke the heavenly
bodies to protect food plants and animals. These acts comprise prayers to the Sun
776 for rain (p. 62), for protection of game animals (p. 71), and on behalf of wild
796 fruits (p. 72); and to the Moon to prosper the crops when maize has grown to about
3 feet in height (p. 62).
- 789 On the other hand, there was no trace of religion at the maize-planting ceremony
(p. 62), nor was the hôwá ceremony on behalf of the sweet-potato crop at all
527 related to Sun and Moon worship, though it does bear a magical significance
(p. 63).
- 782 During the entire period of my stay I witnessed only two instances of a person's
supplicating the Sun. The first time a young woman was praying for a child
776 (p. 130); the second time I heard a mother instructing her approximately seven-
year-old son, who had been ill for a long time, to invoke the Sun as follows:
"Kédeti! Iymâ ampô'no, vatoekûne iypey! (Grandfather! Give me a remedy so
that I'll recover!)" Further, I learnt that, when putting the mats soiled at the deliv-
ery into the fork of a steppe tree, the mother of a lying-in woman supplicates the
Sun, as stated (p. 106), to protect the newborn infant.
- 787 The prayers have no fixed text, the suppliant addressing the Sun spontaneously
as though conversing with an ordinary person. Thus some address him as pa'pâm,
Our Father; others as Kédeti, Grandfather. I have never heard of any Ramkô'-
kamekra seeing Sun or Moon in dreams or visions.
- 821 There is little knowledge of the course of the heavenly bodies. Time is reckoned
805 by lunar phases and by seasons (rainy and dry). They do not know how many full
moons there are in a year, being handicapped by their aboriginal number system,
which does not go beyond four. They do not ponder the nature of the solar body.
They know approximately where the sun rises and sets during the wet and the dry
season, but they do not empirically determine the solstice or use it in time reckoning.
- 821 The younger age classes, regularly assembled in the plaza at sunset, always con-
sider it fun to expect the appearance of the new moon, each youth vying with the
rest to discover it first. As soon as it is detected, everybody raises his hands and
utters piercing shouts "to give pleasure to the Moon."
- 821 The moon spots are explained in Ramkô'kamekra myth (p. 244) and somewhat
796 differently by the Kréyé of Bacabal.³ No explanation was obtained for the lunar
phases.
- A lunar eclipse is called pquvri hitik, that is, dying of the moon. In 1935 I wit-
nessed one and went purposely to the plaza to sleep there. Since the sky was some-
what clouded, the Indians did not notice what was going on until the darkening

² Nimuendaju, *The Apinayé*, 158.

³ Nimuendaju, *Vokabular und Sagen der Crangâs*.

821 without the stars of the hook on the tail. It stood along the ostrich's path and he
772 threatened to knock it down, but it begged to be spared since it would kill many
people if it fell to the earth. Accordingly, the ostrich passes close beside this palm.
Another constellation near the galaxy, which I was never able to grasp, is called
kapúre (= jahó, *Tinamus* sp.).

In Magellanic Cloud they see Auké's ashes (p. 245).

821 Against lightning, which they greatly fear because of its frequently observed
789 effects on steppe trees, they resort to magic. A native will put the leaves of oilbo de
boi (ropnto, jaguar eye) on his head and wave them toward the thunderstorm,
saying, "mekričwaye, amekaprinare witičiye!"

821 The Kréyé of Bacabal have a tale in which the storm figures as a tapir. The same
772 story was heard among the descendants of the Gamella of Vianna.²²

The rainbow (tanyočwudn, person of the rain) has its two ends resting in the
open mouths of two sueriju snakes, which themselves yield rain. It appears as a
sign that the rain has ceased. When the rainbow disappears, two eel-like fish, pup-
peyre (Neobraz : mngum), rise to the sky, where they drop into a water hole. When
there is a heavy rain they again drop back into the terrestrial water. One informant
said that snakes ascended to the sky by the rainbow lest there be too many here
on earth.

In the sky dwell carrion vultures under their chief, the king vulture, and falcons.
They have human shape there, organize log races and celebrate festivals.

There is an underworld (ikrakripyé). According to a tale a man hunting an
armadillo broke through the ground, tumbling into the underworld. "When he
turned round, he noticed that he was on a steppe, but round about no living being
was to be seen, not even a bird; everything near and far was still." The Serénte tell
a similar story, which they connect with their kwiudé'udá racing logs, which they
derive from said armadillo.

ANIMISM

774 Every human being and every animal has a soul. Plants "perhaps" also have a
775 soul, but theirs plays no part. At death the soul leaves the body through the mouth;
nobody knows how and where it enters the body. The soul of a dead person, the
distinct shadow cast by him, and his image are all called mekaró. I have no evi-
dence for belief in a temporary departure of the soul from a living body. Contrary
to Apinayé theory, sickness is not imputed to temporary soul loss,²³ and the medi-
cine-man's shadow is not supposed to roam about in order to learn what is going
on at a distance. Accordingly, during a man's lifetime his soul does not play an
independent role of practical significance.

775 It becomes all the more prominent after death; indeed, communion with the
[77] souls of the dead is the most conspicuous part of Eastern Timbira religion and
forcibly struck Pohl among the Pörekamekra:

Anch hier [i.e. in the cemetery for secondary burial] besuchen die Indianer noch oft die Grabhügel
ihrer entschlafenen Lieben und erzählen ihnen alle Vorfälle, fest überzeugt, dass die
Verstorbenen sie hören und Anteil nehmen können. Diese Sitten erschien mir stets sehr rührend,
und ich gestehe, dass ich oft fassig bewegt diese guten Menschen so an den Gräbern sitzen sah.

However, I never observed this form of devotion near the graves. Further, I have
neither discovered a belief in everlasting rewards or punishments, such as Pohl
ascribes to these natives, nor ever heard that a soft rustling noise revealed the
approach of the spirits.

The spirits of the dead usually reside in village-like communities in the localities

²² Nimuendaju, *Vokabular und Sagen der Crengés*, 635; *The Gamella*, 11.
²³ *The Apinayé*, 144.

775 where they lived or were buried, that is, especially on old camp sites and in cemeteries, the will-o'-the-wisps occasionally rising from the ground of the latter being conceived as the spirits' camp fires. However, at times the souls also appear singly and in other places. Otherwise inexplicable shouting (*mekaprép*), such as occasionally resounds at night in steppes and woods, is ascribed to roaming spirits. Another abode is below the water of the Lake Kukamóroča (p. 249).

775 Apart from some peculiarities due to their shadowy character, the souls lead an existence very similar to that of the living. They are neither more nor less happy.
787 The spirits of old people, such as parents, grandparents and the grandparents' siblings, are credited with greater knowledge than is within the ken of the living; some declare that they know "everything." Accompanying their living relatives, they protect them wherever possible, drive away poisonous snakes from their path, and appear to them in waking hours or dreams in order to warn them against misfortune. Normally they are invisible; but if they so desire they can turn visible even in the middle of the day, either in their mortal shape or in some beast's. At night their sudden appearance, as a rule of but momentary duration, strikes terror into the visionary's heart, so that he will remain ill for days—notwithstanding the fact that these spirits are not hostile to man.

The story of *Yawé'* (p. 246) gives a tolerably clear picture of the relations between the living and the dead. The hero receives every kind of aid from the spirits and through intimate contact with them ultimately acquires the power to transform himself into an animal.

Around a dying Indian's bed the spirits of his deceased kin assemble. Sometimes, even some time before he breathes his last, they will persuade him to adopt their customs, to cease eating and speaking. These spirits accompany the corpse to the grave and, rejoicing to have the person in their midst now, they will conduct his soul to its new resting place. Souls of sucking babes are taken by a maternal uncle or corresponding kinsman. On the way to the hereafter the soul gets to a brook bridged by a thin, swaying tree; if the soul should slip off, it will be converted into an aquatic animal.

In general the relations between the living and the dead are wholly individual, but in the *ketúaye* they assume tribal character (p. 171). Here there are involved the totality of prospective initiates and the entire company of souls of the dead. As explained, it is difficult to get an explicit interpretation of this relationship from the present-day Indians, who obviously are not quite clear on the point. However, I cannot doubt that the principal object of the festival is to establish contact of the boys with the spirits. With reference to the last celebration, in 1934, which I was unfortunately unable to attend, an authoritative informant explained: "When the *ketúaye* sing in the spirit language [the *ayq'k* chant], the spirits approach, wishing to take away their shadow-souls. If they succeeded, the individuals in question would die at once. That is why the boys' kinswomen sit behind the boys with hands on their shoulders, while their kinsmen stand in the rear."

MAGIC

789 The sun worship of these people is not connected with magic, or at least can do without it. In the instances on pages 131-132 one prayer is uttered accompanied by the
● [571] magical use of *urnéú*, while the other has no association with magic at all. The
774 prayers themselves are wholly devoid of magical import. On the other hand, animism and magic are intimately linked. The tale of *Yawé'* illustrates the derivation of curative and magical knowledge from the spirits. Persons evincing ability and

797 give up their mission in Colonia because of the hostile attitude assumed by the Guajajara. An attempt to settle among the Krikati was frustrated by the dispersal of that tribe in 1930. Since 1924 the missionaries have been also interested in the Krahô',¹⁰⁰ where two Neobrazilians, Zacharias Campello and Francisco Collares, have been operating, but in 1930 I was unable to detect there any influence on the native modes of thought. Collares was repeating the old Capuchin error in trying to transform the Krahô' villages into a colony. His attitude is illustrated by his remark to me about log racing; this must be abolished, being a barbarous, brutal sport detrimental to Indian health and tending to "exterminate" so useful a tree as the burity; in its place he intended to introduce the civilized football game. He bitterly complained that since my arrival the Krahô' were absenting themselves from him, and tried—intelligibly enough from his standpoint—to throw all sorts of obstacles in my way. I got the impression that even then many of the Krahô' were thoroughly tired of him. After another five years' activity he made statements about the Krahô'¹⁰¹ that prove his complete ignorance of the Indians' religious and social ideas—the part of their life which should be of foremost interest to a missionary. Not long after this he seems to have abandoned the mission, which his colleague had left some time before. In 1937 I met him again in Piabanha on the upper Tocantins, where he owned a school for Neobrazilians, a shop, and several houses, and—I do not know with what justification—presented himself as a missionary to the Serénte.

● 791
177 The Râmkô/kamekra and Apô'nyekra have hitherto had neither Catholic nor Protestant missionaries. Such knowledge as they have of Christianity results from observation of Neobrazilians and the occasional, clumsy efforts of these neighbors to impose their ideas. However, the possibility of adopting the alien faith is quite inconceivable to these Indians, in whose life even indigenous religious notions play a subordinate part. Accordingly, their supernaturalism has remained free of foreign admixture. Baptism and, exceptionally, church weddings are resorted to not for religious but solely from social motives since Neobrazilians equate pagans with the wild beasts and recognize only marriages sanctioned by the church.

The Indians do know the names of half a dozen saints, but lack any notion of their or of Jesus' personality; these names, like the Devil's, merely figure as rhetorical embellishments of their Portuguese speech, patterned as it is on Neobrazilian models. They are thus quite indifferent to the figures of Christian faith. Unlike the Serénte, they have made no attempt to identify these—except for God the Father—with aboriginal counterparts. Auké (p. 245) is regarded as the Brazilian Emperor Pedro II. The cross does not even serve magical purposes; the little crosses and saints' medallions worn around the neck are regarded as purely decorative. This is the extent of their "Catholicism," to which Ignace refers. The Protestant songs the Indians, especially the women, try to learn, precisely as they do the heathen chants of the Guajajara.

¹⁰⁰ Grubb, *Lowland Indians*, 29.

¹⁰¹ Estevão Pinto, *Indígenas do Nordeste*, 214, note.